

LITHUANIA LEADERS OFFER TO SUSPEND INDEPENDENCE STEP

URGE PARLIAMENT TO ACT

Proposal Hinges on an End to Soviet Sanctions and on a Start to Negotiations

By FRANCIS X. CLINES

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MOSCOW, June 16 — The government of Lithuania endorsed a proposal today that it suspend the republic's declaration of independence, provided that the Gorbachev Government end economic sanctions and begin negotiating a compromise settlement of the sovereignty crisis.

The action by the executive branch of the Lithuanian republic was in the form of a recommendation to its Parliament that it act favorably on the compromise proposal when it takes up the issue next week.

The council thus moved forward the negotiating plan devised this week in informal talks at the Kremlin between leaders of the central Government and Lithuania. A moratorium on the March 11 declaration of independence by the Lithuanian Parliament has been demanded by the Kremlin as the price for suspending its economic embargo and beginning formal negotiations.

Lengthy Debate Predicted

The Lithuanian President, Vytautas Landsbergis, predicted a lengthy debate on the measure. There was no immediate estimate available of the mood of the republic's Parliament, although its approval might seem likely for a plan already endorsed by the Lithuanian leadership.

President Mikhail S. Gorbachev endorsed the general terms of the negotiating plan in an effort to end the three-month crisis that has increased his troubles with nationalist movements and ethnic groups around the nation. The crisis has also impeded his efforts to win United States trade concessions that could help the floundering Soviet economy.

End of Embargo Urged First

The economic embargo ordered by Mr. Gorbachev to deal with what he denounced as an unconstitutional action has led to the closing of most Lithuanian factories and the making idle of tens of thousands of workers.

At the same time, Lithuanian leaders have stressed that the republic's resolve for independence has only grown during the embargo.

In its announcement, the Lithuanian council stressed that it was recom-

Lithuanian Government Backs Suspension of Independence

Continued From Page 1

mending that while the Parliament not delay in declaring a temporary moratorium, it should not take effect until the Soviet embargo on fuel and other needed commodities actually has ended.

"A moratorium only means that for the duration of negotiations the use of the rights stemming from the independence act is postponed," the council asserted in a statement, drawing a distinction between independence in principle and the series of laws to enact an end to Moscow ties. "The status of Lithuania as an independent state does not change."

If the republic's Parliament agrees, it would temporarily suspend laws that attempt to exempt Lithuanian men from the Soviet military draft and expropriate property claimed by the Soviet Government, among other actions. Moscow claims such laws are illegal.

But Lithuania and the two other Baltic republics, Estonia and Latvia, hold that Moscow's rule has lacked legitimacy ever since it annexed the republics 50 years ago as part of a secret pact between Stalin and Hitler.

Described as a Beginning

There was no immediate reaction from the Kremlin to today's Lithuanian council announcement, but Tass, the Government press agency, described it as "an important decision" that could mean "the beginning of the solution" to the drawn-out standoff between Vilnius and Moscow.

The Lithuanian executive's action was expected, since Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene had spoken of increased hope between the two sides when she headed home after the Kremlin talks this week.

The Soviet Prime Minister, Nikolai I. Ryzhkov, had spoken in a similar tone and announced a token increase in fuel

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The Baltic move would be put on hold during talks with the Kremlin.

to a fertilizer factory in Lithuania as a good faith gesture to encourage eventual negotiations.

The next critical step will be the deliberations in the Lithuanian Parliament, which is to provide the republic's final word on the negotiating proposal.

Fast Action Is Urged

At the same time, Lithuanian leaders indicated that they expected the Kremlin to be acting fast to end the embargo. Their statement emphasized that the permanence of the mutual concessions — the independence moratorium and renewal of Moscow trade — ultimately was subject to the opening of formal negotiations and their success.

"The breaking off of negotiations automatically brings an end to the moratorium," the republic council cautioned.

The form and substance of eventual



Associated Press

Dalnis Evans, left, chairman of the Latvian Popular Front, with President Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania at a meeting of Baltic leaders yesterday in Jurmala, Latvia.

negotiations toward a compromise agreement are not yet clear. President Gorbachev met last week with the leaders of the Baltic republics, inviting negotiations toward a treaty to help in his promised change of the nature of the

Soviet Union so that all 15 republics might be treated as "sovereign states."

The crisis over the republics' unrest deepened considerably for Mr. Gorbachev last week when the Parliament of

the Russian republic, the nation's heartland, led now by Mr. Gorbachev's chief antagonist, Boris N. Yeltsin, adopted a sovereignty resolution that Soviet law should be considered secondary to Russian law.